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Statement

By
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Other lectures in this archive have spoken about unintentional injury in children and have mentioned the National Safe Kids Campaign. To refresh the user's memory, I was the honorary chair of the National Safe Kids Campaign when I was Surgeon General but after I retired from that office I became the actual chairman of the National Safe Kids Campaign and served in that capacity for 13 years, resigning from that post in 2002. This lecture is included in this archive because I think it is of tremendous importance to the United States and I think careful reading of the statement proves my point without question.

This was in the last year of my second term as Surgeon General and I noted as I spoke on various subjects that I injected more urgency, blunter language, and more depth of feeling than you will probably find in most of my other lectures. That was because I knew my time was limited and there was still a lot to be said and to be done.

So many things that I mentioned in this statement are things that Congress could take under its purview and do something about. As usual my time for prepared remarks was limited to five minutes but I exercised the privilege given to those who appear as witnesses, and left additional material behind that came from Safe Kids, the Centers for Disease Control, and the National Institutes of Child health and Development. There was a brisk question and answer period not included here.

I was joined that morning by my colleague and good friend, Dr. Vernon N. Houk, Director of the Center for environmental Health and Injury Control, one of the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta.

I started out with statistics because I think they are especially telling in problems dealing with children: 19 million children under the age of 15 are injured seriously every year in the United States. That's one child in four.

I directly addressed the chairman and said: “ If some infectious disease came along that affected one out of every four children in the United States, there would be a huge public outcry and we would be told to spare no expense to find the cure... and to be quick about it”. That statement has become part of all of every publication by the National Safe Kids Campaign. I am proud to have said it. It is true. I also spent some time around the word “accident”, pointing out that people look at an “accident” as being a random inevitable event, an event ordained by fate or some other metaphysical force, an event which none of us poor mortals can control in any way. Unfortunately the use of the word “accident” is a bad one because most injuries to people-- and nearly all injuries to children -- can be predicted and can be prevented. I emphatically stated, “ But such injuries are preventable. They are no “accident.” This statement is also on every Safe Kids publication in an abridged form and is a play on words:“ Safe kids are no accident.“

I felt that almost every word I said in this statement was important. I used blunt language, I pulled on their emotional heartstrings, and I did everything I could to leave the impression that unintentional injury was -- as it truly is -- a horrendous problem in the United States. It is not only the death, it is the permanent disabilities. In reference to the later, I described a disabled child going through infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adult life carrying the burden of a preventable injury.

Nothing does justice to my message except reading it all.

Arrested development
Center for Disease Control
Center for Environmental Health and Injury Control
Child abuse and neglect
Choking on toys
Defensive driving
Difficulty of educating a disabled child
Disability for life
Drowning in bath tubs
Drowning in swimming pools
Effects of unintentional injury on families
Effects of unintentional injury on society
Falls
Fatalism about accidents
House fires
Infant car seats
Intentional Injuries
Lifetime cost of unintentional injury
Living a life with a permanent disability
Marriage and disability
Misuse of the word “accident”
Parents that have Infectious disease with
unintentional injury
Physical versus mental disability

Poisoning by drugs and medications
Poisoning by household chemicals
Preventability of “accidents”
Predictability of unintentional injury
Restricted life experience
Safer highways
Safer homes and schools
Safer playgrounds and recreational areas
Safer toys
Statistics of Injuries in Children
The disability of unintentional injury
The extra measure of caution
Transparent evasion of adult responsibility
Unintentional injuries
Unintentional injury involving automobiles
Unintentional injury involving bicycles
Unintentional injury on the highway
Vulnerability of children

Dr. Vernon N. Houk